



Environmental News

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EPA PROPOSES MAKING ETHANOL EASIER TO USE IN CLEANER-BURNING GASOLINE

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The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today proposed an action that will make it easier for oil refiners to use ethanol in cleaner-burning gasoline, while maintaining the air quality benefits of the program. This action will fully recognize the environmental benefits of ethanol and ensure that it will continue to play a role in the cleaner-burning gasoline program.

Specifically, today's proposal makes it easier for refiners to blend ethanol in cleaner-burning gasoline by recognizing that the use of ethanol, more so than other oxygenates, reduces the air pollutant carbon monoxide from the tailpipe. Normally, for cleaner-burning gasoline with ethanol to meet pollution reduction standards, an adjustment must be made to the gasoline. That adjustment involves reducing the evaporative property of gasoline to accommodate ethanol, since ethanol can make gasoline evaporate more readily, which leads to an increase in air pollution. EPA's proposed adjustment allows refiners to slightly increase the evaporative property of gasoline in exchange for the carbon-monoxide reductions derived from using ethanol. This adjustment will maintain the overall air quality benefits of the program.

The cleaner-burning gasoline program is aimed at reducing pollution in the smoggiest cities in the U.S. Smog threatens millions of Americans each year with respiratory problems, and is particularly dangerous to children, who are increasingly at risk to asthma attacks. Many chemicals from tailpipes, including carbon monoxide, contribute to the formation of smog. The National Academy of Sciences recommended that we recognize the contribution of carbon monoxide to ozone formation in evaluating the benefits of cleaner-burning gasoline. EPA's program is eliminating air pollution equal to that from 16 million cars a year. The program, established by Congress under the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, also significantly reduces toxic air pollutants, such as benzene, which cause cancer.

Ethanol has been in use in reformulated gasoline since 1995. The Congress required that reformulated gasoline contain two percent oxygen by weight. To meet this requirement, oil refiners generally can choose between MTBE and ethanol. If gasoline containing MTBE leaks or is spilled into the environment, it can enter the groundwater and render water supplies undrinkable due to taste and odor impacts. The Administration has called on Congress to pass legislation that will significantly reduce or eliminate the use of MTBE. By providing refiners with more flexibility to use ethanol, this proposal will help reduce the use of MTBE.

Before releasing its proposal, EPA first wanted to analyze an alternative proposal submitted by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. EPA is specifically requesting comment on the alternative Illinois proposal as well as the agency's preferred proposal during the 60 day comment period. EPA's proposed rule is available at: <http://www.epa.gov/otaq/rfg.htm>.